

109TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 190

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 16 (legislative day, MARCH 15), 2006

Received and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Congress that the Russian Federation should fully protect the freedoms of all religious communities without distinction, whether registered and unregistered, as stipulated by the Russian Constitution and international standards.

Whereas the Russian Federation is a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and has freely committed to fully respect the rights of individuals, whether alone or in community with others, to profess and practice religion or belief;

Whereas the Russian Federation specifically committed in the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document to “take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief” and to “grant upon their request to communities of believers, practicing or prepared to practice their faith within the constitutional framework of their States, recognition of the status provided for them in the respective countries”;

Whereas Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation declares “everyone shall be guaranteed the right to freedom of conscience, to freedom of religious worship, including the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion” and Article 8 of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations provides for registration for religious communities as “religious organizations,” if they have at least 10 members and have operated within the Russian Federation with legal status for at least 15 years;

Whereas registration is critical for religious groups to fully enjoy their religious freedoms, as many rights and privileges afforded to religious communities in the Russian Federation are contingent on obtaining registration;

Whereas many religious groups refuse to seek registration on theological or other grounds, while other communities have been unjustly denied registration or had their registration improperly terminated by local authorities;

Whereas many of the unregistered communities in the Russian Federation today were never registered under the Soviet system because they refused to collaborate with that government’s anti-religious policies and they are now

experiencing renewed discrimination and repression from the authorities;

Whereas over the past 2 years there have been an estimated ten arson attacks on unregistered Protestant churches, with little or no effective response by law enforcement officials to bring the perpetrators to justice;

Whereas in some areas of the Russian Federation law enforcement personnel have carried out violent actions against believers from unregistered communities peacefully practicing their faith; and

Whereas the United States has sought to protect the fundamental and inalienable human right to seek, know, and serve God according to the dictates of one's own conscience, in accordance with the international agreements committing nations to respect individual freedom of thought, conscience, and belief: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
 2 *concurring)*, That it is the sense of the Congress that the
 3 United States should—

4 (1) urge the Russian Federation to ensure full
 5 protection of freedoms for all religious communities
 6 without distinction, whether registered and unregis-
 7 tered, and end the harassment of unregistered reli-
 8 gious groups by the security apparatus and other
 9 government agencies;

10 (2) urge the Russian Federation to ensure that
 11 law enforcement officials vigorously investigate acts
 12 of violence against unregistered religious commu-

1 nities, as well as make certain that authorities are
2 not complicit in such attacks;

3 (3) continue to raise concerns with the Govern-
4 ment of the Russian Federation over violations of re-
5 ligious freedom, including those against unregistered
6 religious communities, especially indigenous denomi-
7 nations not well known in the United States;

8 (4) ensure that United States Embassy officials
9 engage local officials throughout the Russian Fed-
10 eration, especially when violations of freedom of reli-
11 gion occur, and undertake outreach activities to edu-
12 cate local officials about the rights of unregistered
13 religious communities;

14 (5) urge both the Personal Representative of
15 the OSCE Chair-in-Office on Combating Racism,
16 Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on In-
17 tolerance and Discrimination against Christians and
18 Members of Other Religions, and the United Nations
19 Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
20 to visit the Russian Federation and raise with fed-
21 eral and local officials concerns about the free prac-
22 tice of unregistered religious communities; and

23 (6) urge the Council of Europe and its member
24 countries to raise with Russian Federation officials
25 issues relating to freedom of religion, especially in

1 light of the Russian Federation's responsibilities as
2 President of the Council in 2006.

Passed the House of Representatives March 15,
2006.

Attest:

KAREN L. HAAS,

Clerk.